



P.O. Box 19334
Irvine, CA 92623-9334

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Smart Living with Asthma

IN THIS ISSUE:

Flu Vaccine: A Shot in the Arm

Asthma and Exercise

Mold in Home May Up Asthma Risk

Does Breastfeeding Cut Asthma Odds?

Asthma Tied to Microwave Exposure

Recipe: Great Pumpkin Soup



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Recipe: Great Pumpkin Soup

In honor of the season, we bring you this recipe from the Mayo Clinic for a hearty and healthy *pumpkin* soup! The great pumpkin and its seeds are tasty and chock full of nutrients like vitamins C and E, iron, zinc, magnesium, and potassium. *Enjoy!*

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 3/4 cup water
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 8 ounces pumpkin puree (fresh or canned) *Make your own puree by roasting a small pumpkin and whipping the flesh in a blender or food processor.
- 1 cup unsalted vegetable broth
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 cup fat-free milk
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 green onion, green top only, chopped



Directions In a large saucepan, heat 1/4 cup of the water over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until tender, about 3 minutes. Don't let the onion dry out.

Add the remaining water, pumpkin, broth, cinnamon and nutmeg. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in the milk and cook until hot. Don't boil. Ladle into warmed individual bowls

and garnish with black pepper and green onion tops. Serve immediately.

Nutritional analysis Serving size: 1 cup
Calories: 72, Cholesterol: 1 mg, Protein: 3 g,
Sodium: 241 mg, Carbohydrate: 12 g, Fiber: 2 g,
Total Fat: 1 g, Potassium: 199 mg, Saturated Fat:
less than 1 g, Calcium: 78 mg

Flu Vaccine: A Shot in the Arm

Did you get the flu shot last year? Great. But now it's time to get it again.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyone over six months of age get the flu vaccine. It's especially important for young children, people 65 and older, and individuals with asthma, diabetes, heart disease, COPD and other chronic conditions to get vaccinated. This is because their immune systems are weaker.

It's also important for pregnant women to get the vaccine, because the flu can hurt developing fetuses. Ditto for healthcare workers and caregivers so they won't infect the fragile populations (babies, elderly and the infirm) in their care.

And don't forget: the flu vaccine is seasonal. That means you must get it *every year*. Last year's vaccine will *not* protect you against this year's flu, the CDC warns.

The flu vaccine is given two ways – by needle or nasal (nose) mist. The shot is approved for people over six months of age. The nasal spray is approved for healthy people, 2 to 49 years of age, who aren't pregnant.

Side effects. Some people who get the shot may

develop a low-grade fever and/or soreness at the injection site. Children who receive the nasal spray may develop a runny nose, headache, vomiting, muscle aches and/or fever; adults may develop a runny nose, sore throat, headache or cough. Severe reactions are rare. But call your doctor if you develop a high fever, difficulty breathing or other serious symptoms.

People who previously had a bad reaction or have a severe allergy to chicken eggs (the flu vaccine is grown in eggs) should not get the vaccine.

In addition to the vaccine, the CDC recommends you take the following precautions to cut your risk of getting – and spreading – the flu:

- Wash hands frequently.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your arm (*not your hand*) when you cough or sneeze.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Have flu-like symptoms? Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever goes away (without fever-reducing meds).

It takes about two weeks after you're vaccinated to become flu-protected. So the sooner you get jabbed – the better!

Asthma and Exercise

You know the drill. We should all get at least 30 minutes of physical activity, five days a week.

It's good for our heart, our lungs, and even our emotional health. It keeps weight in check and has been linked to a lower risk of just about every medical condition in the book.

But should you exercise if you have asthma? You bet, say health officials. Just be sure to check with your doctor before starting any new exercise program. You shouldn't have any problem if you follow your treatment plan. But if you do, tell your doctor. He or she can likely adjust your therapy to control symptoms during workouts.

The best types of activities for people with asthma are ones that involve short periods of exercise with rest in between. These include sports like baseball and wrestling. Biking, swimming and walking are also good ones.



Cold-weather sports (ice-skating, ice hockey, cross-country skiing) may not be as easy to do. Basketball, soccer, long-distance running and other activities that involve long periods of exertion may also be a bit harder to do. But many people with asthma can enjoy these activities, too!

The best way to control symptoms:

- Use inhaler (inhaled bronchodilator) as directed by your doctor before beginning a workout.
- Warm up before and cool-down after exercising.
- If it's cold outside, exercise indoors or wear a mask or scarf over your nose and mouth.
- Have allergic asthma? Don't exercise outside when pollen counts and smog levels are high.
- Limit exercise when you have a cold or other infection.
- Don't overdo it. Exercise at a level that's good for you.

If you start to have symptoms during a workout, stop and repeat your pre-exercise inhaled medication as directed by your doctor. You can start exercising again if your symptoms go away completely. But stop if your symptoms return. Repeat your quick-relief medication and call your doctor for advice.

Mold in Home May Up Asthma Risk

Do you have mold in your home? May be time to get rid of it – especially if you have a baby or one on the way.

A new study found that infants who live in moldy houses are more than twice as likely as other children to develop asthma.

University of Cincinnati researchers followed a group of 176 children from birth to age 7 to see if mold affects asthma risk.

Their findings, published in the journal *Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology*: children living in homes with high levels of mold (measured using federal standards) during their first year were 2.6 times more likely to develop asthma than those in low-mold homes.

During the study, 31 (18 percent) of the children developed asthma.

“Early life exposure to mold seems to play a critical role in childhood asthma development,” said study author Tina Reponen, an environmental health professor at the University of Cincinnati.

The mold/asthma link was particularly strong in children with a family history of asthma and sensitivity to dust mites, according to the study.

In contrast, air conditioning at a young age slightly reduced asthma risk, the study found.

Researchers' advice: Parents and expectant parents – especially those with a family history of allergy or asthma – should correct water damage and reduce mold in their homes ASAP!



Does Breastfeeding Cut Asthma Odds?

Breastfeeding for at least six months may help reduce asthma-related symptoms, a new Dutch study has found.

Researchers at Erasmus Medical Center in the Netherlands followed 5,364 children for four years to gauge the effect of breastfeeding on asthma risk.

Their findings, published in the *European Respiratory Journal*: infants breastfed for at least six months and exclusively (no solids or formula) for at least four months were less likely than other babies to develop asthma symptoms.

According to the study, children who never breastfed were 50 percent more likely than those who breastfed for six months to develop asthma symptoms. Breastfed babies also given formula and solids during their first four months were 20 percent more likely than infants fed only breast milk to develop asthma symptoms.

Other studies have suggested that breastfed babies are less likely to develop asthma, become obese or develop type 2 diabetes and other diseases later in life. But this is the first research to indicate that the *length of time* a baby nurses may play a role in reducing asthma-related symptoms.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that moms breastfeed infants for the first six months, followed by breastfeeding combined with the introduction of solid foods for another six months.



Asthma Tied to Microwave Exposure

A new study warns that exposure to low-level electro-magnetic fields (EMF) during pregnancy may raise the risk of asthma in offspring.

The U.S. asthma rate has been steadily climbing since the 1980s. Ditto the number of man-made low-level EMF sources like microwave ovens, hair dryers, vacuum cleaners, fans, coffee grinders, refrigerators, stoves and pretty much anything else that uses electricity.

So researchers decided to examine if there might be a link.

They studied 801 pregnant women, who wore meters to measure their daily low-level EMF exposure. The researchers followed up for 13 years to see which, if any, of their children developed asthma.

Their findings, published in the journal *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*: offspring of women who had high EMF exposure while pregnant had three times the asthma risk of children of women with low-level exposure.

According to the study, 130 (or 20.8 percent) of the children developed asthma. The asthma/EMF link was especially strong for first-born children and those whose moms had a history of asthma. “The message here is exposure to electromagnetic fields is not good and we need to pay attention to its adverse effect on health,” said lead study author De-Kun Li, a reproductive epidemiologist at the Kaiser Permanente Division of Research in Oakland, Calif.

It's virtually impossible to avoid all EMFs. But scientists suggest pregnant women try to minimize exposure.

“The best way to reduce your magnetic field exposure is distance. Magnetic field strength drops dramatically with increasing distance from the source,” Li said. “So pregnant women should try to limit their exposure to known MF sources and keep their distance from them when they are in use.”

Translation: Don't stand in front of the microwave when it's heating stuff up. And hold your hairdryer as far from your belly as possible. Better yet – air-dry your locks!

